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Ministry Mulls Using Student Labor to Finish Beleaguered Vostochny Cosmodrome

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Instead of taking their exams this summer, university students in Russia's Far East could be put to work by the state to finish construction of the delay-hit Vostochny Cosmodrome there, the Interfax news agency reported Wednesday.

"We suggested both to universities specializing in construction and the Education Ministry that they consider moving the dates of summer finals to the spring. That way students would be able to participate in the creation of this unique project, gain practical professional experience and, of course, earn some money," Construction Ministry deputy head Leonid Stavitsky was quoted by Interfax as saying.

Construction of the spaceport in the Amur region is at least 60 days behind schedule due to a lack of construction workers and insufficient funding, the head of the Federal Space Agency Igor Komarov has said.

It was earlier reported that only 3,300 builders were currently working on Vostochny's construction, while at least 12,000 are needed to finish the project, Interfax reported.

Komarov also said Wednesday that the Federal Agency for Special Construction responsible for building the cosmodrome had failed to account for 39 billion rubles ($700 million), more than half of the 61 billion rubles allocated to the project from 2011 to 2015, Russian media reported.

The project aims to reduce reliance on the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, the world's largest space launch facility, and was kickstarted in January 2011. The launch of the first rocket from Vostochny is due to take place by the end of this year.

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